

FEDERAL AID TO EDUCATION

Statement made by

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The Office of Education of the Federal Security Agency has, for a number of years, consistently favored Federal aid to the States in the support of their programs of public elementary and secondary education. As Commissioner of Education, I strongly favor such a Federal aid program.

In my opinion, the evidence in favor of a sound program of Federal aid to education is overwhelming. I recognize that there are high-minded groups and individuals throughout the nation sincerely opposed to any Federal aid for schools. I believe, however, that much of this opposition is based either on a misunderstanding of some of the important evidence or on fears and misapprehensions which will largely disappear when carefully examined in the light of all the pertinent facts.

Importance of Education in a Democracy

My own study of the evidence leads me to favor a sound program of Federal aid for public elementary and secondary schools for the following reasons:

1. The very existence of our great democratic nation depends on a highly enlightened citizenry. In our form of government, the citizens are called upon again and again to decide great national and international issues. Wise decisions cannot be made unless those issues and the implications growing out of those issues are reasonably well understood. Citizens with only

a few brief years of schooling are likely to be handicapped in comprehending many of the important problems involved and for that reason are more easily subject to misleading propaganda. They cannot be counted on to make wise decisions. Well educated citizens, who have been trained to obtain all the facts and decide issues on the basis of all pertinent evidence, constitute the best safeguard for a democracy. This observation has been stressed over and over again by national leaders almost from the time this country was established.

2. In times of a great national crisis, such as during the recent World War, we are impressed with the fact that the very existence of our nation may depend on a relatively high level of education for all citizens. Citizens with limited education tend to make inferior soldiers under conditions of modern technological warfare. During such a crisis we cannot afford to take the time to attempt to give the fundamentals of education to prospective members of our Armed Forces. They must have a good background of general education and have developed many technical skills in order to make their proper contribution to the defense of the nation.
3. The more highly educated the citizens, the greater the likelihood of a successful and prosperous nation and of the development and maintenance of a high level of living in peacetime. This observation has been well substantiated during recent years by many studies, including especially some of the studies by the

Chamber of Commerce of the United States. That organization has devoted at least two publications to the idea that education pays; that it is an investment in people. I refer to the bulletins entitled Education--an Investment in People and Education Steps Up Living Standards, published in 1945. These studies of developments in the various States and in other nations have led to the conclusion that economic progress and prosperity go hand in hand with a high level of education; that States and nations which have spent most on education and have developed the best program of education for all citizens are the ones that have attained the greatest prosperity and are making the greatest progress. Our own great nation affords the best proof of this statement.

4. A relatively high level of education is necessary, not just in a few States or for a few citizens, but in all States and for all citizens. Citizens in every State and in every walk of life participate in making decisions. They contribute to the economic prosperity of the nation. The best single safeguard to our democratic way of life therefore is a great body of well educated citizens. With 60 per cent of our adult population living in States other than those in which they were born, it is clear that educational privation in one State affects all States.

Some Significant Facts

I am sure all of us have heard these observations or others like them again and again. I am convinced that the American people as a whole are of the same opinion. I doubt, however, whether all of us are fully

aware of some of the basic facts regarding the condition of education in this country. A brief summary of some of the most important facts relating to the school situation should be helpful in reaching a decision regarding the importance of Federal aid for public elementary and secondary schools.

1. Most children of school age in some States and some children of school age in nearly every State have not had, and still do not have, a reasonably defensible minimum education.

According to the 1940 census, the average educational level attained by the adult citizens of the various States ranged from a little less than 7th grade level in two southern States to above the 10th grade level in three western States. In general there has been a fairly close relationship between the average number of grades completed by the citizens of a State and the level of expenditures for public schools over a period of years.

While the level of expenditure does not necessarily show the level of education provided in a State, and while averages never give a satisfactory picture of the situation in all parts of a State, nevertheless average levels of expenditure do tend to indicate fairly reliably the adequacy or lack of adequacy of educational offerings. As stated on page 38 of Education--an Investment in People, published by the Chamber of Commerce, "It is a fact of great significance that the states which averaged highest in expenditures per pupil in attendance at public schools in the last thirty years, are today among the states of higher adult educational level and of higher economic well-being."

Within the past few days the printed report of a significant study of education entitled The Forty-Eight State School Systems has become available. This study, carried out by the Council of State Governments at the request of the Governors Conference, provides the first official data on education for the year 1947-48 for most States. The information in the report came from the offices of the Governors of the States, cooperating with the State departments of education. The report shows clearly that trends which have been established and differences which have existed during prior years have continued without any significant changes except in a few instances.

According to the data in this report, the current expense (including interest) per pupil in average daily attendance ranged in 1947-48 from \$66.54 in Mississippi to approximately \$260 in New York and New Jersey. Thus, some States were last year spending approximately four times as much per pupil, exclusive of capital outlay, for their elementary and secondary school programs as other States. But that startling difference is not new. Ten years ago, in 1937-38, the current expense per pupil ranged from \$28.35 in Mississippi to \$159.67 in New York. At that time, the highest State average expenditure per pupil was slightly more than five times as great as the lowest, but the actual dollar difference in per pupil expenditures in 1947-48 was greater than in 1937-38.

2. Some States have a much greater educational load to carry than others; that is, the number of children in the total population is much higher in certain States than in others. The number of children from 5-17 years of age in 1947, according to Bureau of Census estimates, ranged from 166 per thousand of the total population in New Jersey to 283 in New Mexico. The average number of children per thousand of the total population in the six States with the greatest income per child was only 172, whereas in the six States with the least income per child the average was 266, or more than 50 percent greater.

3. Some States have much greater ability to support an educational program than others. I recognize that no perfect measure of ability has yet been devised. The most commonly accepted, and probably the most valid single, measure of ability to support all phases of government is the average income per capita. Since the number of children in the total population varies so greatly, the per capita income probably is not as satisfactory a measure of ability to support the school program as income per child of school age, 5-17 inclusive. For the year 1947, the income per child of school age ranged from \$2,374 in Mississippi to \$10,742 in New York. Thus the most wealthy State had approximately $4\frac{1}{2}$ times the income per child of school age as the least wealthy.

When we take the six most wealthy States and the six least wealthy States, we find that the average income per child of school age in the six most wealthy States was \$9,911, or more

than three times as great as the average income of \$3,028 in the six least wealthy States. In 1947-48 the six most wealthy States spent an average of \$224 per pupil for current expense whereas the six least wealthy States spent an average of only about \$100 per pupil.

4. The effort made by the respective States to support their public elementary and secondary school programs may fairly satisfactorily be measured in terms of the percentage of the income of the people allocated to, or represented by the revenues provided for, the public schools. The percentage of income of the people allocated to the public schools in the median State in 1947-48 was 2.3.

Some States have been making a much greater effort to support their school program than others. In general, the States with the lowest income per child of school age have been making a greater effort than those with the highest income per child. Of the 10 States having the lowest income per child of school age, all except two were making an effort in 1947-48 equal to or greater than the median State and these two were only slightly below the median. Of the 10 States with highest income per child of school age only one was making an effort equal to the median State.

The six most wealthy States were, in 1947-48, using an average of only 1.76 percent of the income of the people for their public schools; in contrast, the six least wealthy States were using an average of 2.44 percent. In other words, the least wealthy States were making fifty per cent greater effort to support their schools than the most wealthy.

The Need for Federal Aid for Schools

When the above facts are carefully studied, there is one conclusion which seems to be inescapable. Largely because of differences in wealth or ability, there are some States which, in spite of greater effort to support their school program, have not been able to compete successfully in educational offerings with other States which have made considerably less effort. The only way the six least wealthy States could hope to provide an educational program more nearly equivalent to that provided in the six most wealthy States would be to make an effort about three times as great as that made by the most wealthy States. Economically this much greater effort would probably be impracticable. While some States can always be expected to be more interested in education than others and to be willing to make a greater effort than others, it would probably be disastrous economically for any group of States to make three times the tax effort in proportion to their ability to support their schools as other States.

It thus becomes evident that, under present conditions, the least wealthy States must be satisfied with offering very limited educational opportunities for many of their children, or must make such great effort to support their schools that they would handicap themselves economically in competition with other States. However the most wealthy States cannot afford to have this situation continue. If this situation does continue, not only the most wealthy States but the entire nation will continue to be handicapped by the large number of citizens with limited educational background in the least wealthy States. Citizens with little or no education make relatively poor producers and consumers and thus limit the economic progress of the entire nation.

The argument might well be advanced that these conditions are merely temporary and that they will be self correcting. To a limited extent that may be true over a long period of years. There is no indication, however, that these differences will be overcome or even greatly alleviated at any time in the near future. The vicious circle in which the least wealthy States are now caught by force of circumstances will tend to retard their escape and to handicap the entire nation. Since 1940, while the entire economic situation has been rapidly changing, the actual dollar differences in income between the least wealthy and the most wealthy States have been increasing rather than decreasing. For example, in 1940, the per capita income in Mississippi was \$202 and in New York was \$863, a difference of \$661. In 1947, the per capita income in Mississippi was \$659 and in New York was \$1,731, or an actual difference of \$1,122.

I firmly believe that the problem we are facing in education is a national problem as well as a State and local problem. Moreover, I believe it will never be solved satisfactorily until the people of the nation assume their full responsibility for providing financial assistance to the States in accordance with a sound plan which will protect the States from Federal domination and control and yet will help them financially to meet their educational responsibilities.

The wealth in each State is to some extent created by the citizens of all States. New York, California, and other States for example, with a relatively high level of wealth are not naturally wealthy merely because of the efforts of the citizens of those States. They have become wealthy partly because of their strategic position and their natural resources and partly because of the contribution of citizens throughout the country who

have purchased their products and services. Since the wealth of the nation is created by the citizens of all parts of the nation, the nation's wealth should be used to help to educate the children in all States.

There are some who take the position that States can and should make a greater effort than they are now making to support their schools. Within limits, I agree with that position. In fact, I believe practically all States will need to make a greater effort to support their schools than they are now making if, as a nation, we expect to make continuing progress. All States are faced with and recognize the seriousness of their school personnel and building problems because of greatly increased enrollments. As we all know, thousands of teachers have left the profession during recent years because of inadequate salaries. Many States are now finding it exceedingly difficult to attract into the teaching profession, and particularly into the elementary schools, a sufficient number of competent teachers to meet the needs. Similarly all States are faced with serious school building problems. In the solution of both these problems it may be anticipated that the States will find it necessary to make a greater financial effort in support of education.

Even assuming that States make the greater effort which they should, some States will not be able to provide a reasonably adequate school program. The only way to solve this problem, and at the same time promote and protect the general welfare is to develop a plan to provide reasonably adequate minimum educational opportunities for all children.

In this country the legal control of the public schools has been vested in the States. That has been a wise policy and should be continued. Control by the States should assure that no group will ever be able to control education in this country and thus to shape the destiny of the

nation to meet its own selfish ends. As a people we are determined that education shall not be used for nationalistic or selfish ends as it has been in Germany, Italy, and certain other countries.

We are determined not to have Federal control of education. We must not permit any agency of the Federal Government to dictate educational policies. What we must have then, if we are to solve our problems, is a system of Federal aid which will assure that the basic control of education will be left to the States and local school systems.

I am convinced that we can have such a system of Federal aid without Federal controls.

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Basic Principles for Federal Aid

Experience has shown quite definitely what needs to be done and what can be done to provide Federal aid with proper safeguards to local control. Among the safeguards which should be incorporated in any legislation involving Federal aid are the following:

1. The formula should establish and require objective procedures.

It should specifically provide the plan and the criteria to be applied in apportioning funds. It should leave no basic policy decisions to administrative discretion. The amounts provided for the respective States should not be subject to alteration or revision by any Federal administrative agency or official.

Experience has shown that undesirable controls are most likely to creep in when laws provide considerable administrative discretion.

2. The formula which is incorporated in the law should be based on valid measures of need and ability of the respective States and should provide proportionately larger amounts for the States with the most limited financial resources. Needs should be determined in terms of the number of children to be educated in relation to the resources of taxpaying ability of the States. If funds were to be divided equally among the States in terms of the number of pupils or children, a rather large sum would be required to provide any material assistance and even then the differences among the States would still be about as great as they are at the present time. A relatively small sum, if properly distributed

as indicated above, will go a long way toward solving the basic problem of assuring more nearly adequate educational opportunities in the States.

3. The funds should be apportioned directly to the States and not to local school systems. One of the surest ways to lay the foundation for eventual Federal domination and control would be for the Federal Government to ignore the States and deal directly with local school systems. Such a procedure would tend to weaken and break down the traditional State responsibility for education. The Federal Government should, therefore, deal directly with and through the respective State educational authorities.
4. The funds should be provided in the form of general aid for current expenses of the public school program rather than as separate earmarked amounts for specific phases of the program. General grants for broad phases of education involve less probability of interference with proper State responsibilities than grants made for specific aspects.
5. The States should be given the responsibility for defining the scope of the program of public elementary and secondary education to be provided. Some States may wish, for the present, to provide only for the regular 12 grades while others may wish to include kindergartens or junior colleges or both. Some States may wish to restrict their school work to the traditional 9 months; others may prefer to develop a program which provides at least some public school activities on a year-round basis. Such decisions as these should properly be made by the States.

Any attempt on the part of the Federal Government to define what constitutes the public school program would be almost certain to handicap some States in developing what they consider to be a desirable program for their children.

6. Federal funds which are made available to the States for public school purposes should, in effect, become an integral part of the State support program for schools. When funds are being expended within a State the local school system should not have to distinguish between Federal aid funds and State and local funds. It should not be necessary, and in fact would be undesirable, for local school systems to have to keep two different sets of records and make two reports, one for State and local funds and one for Federal funds.
7. The States should be given opportunity to decide whether they wish to accept and use the funds under the conditions prescribed by the Federal Act. As a means of safeguarding State responsibility and integrity, each State should have the opportunity to decide whether or not it wishes to accept and use Federal funds.
8. In the interest of accomplishing the major objective of assuring more nearly adequate educational opportunities, the States should be expected and required to use the funds for the support of public elementary and secondary schools and to provide the necessary evidence to substantiate the fact that the funds have been exclusively so used.
9. Since the controlling objective of the Federal aid program for schools should be to assure better educational opportunities in all States rather than to afford an opportunity to shift State

or local tax burdens for schools, each State should be expected and required to make some reasonable minimum financial effort as one of the conditions for participation for Federal funds. It would also be reasonable to expect all States to continue their present expenditure levels for public schools unless those levels already exceed some reasonable amount which may be expected to assure fairly adequate educational opportunities for all.

10. The States should be expected to use the Federal funds in such a manner as to assure a reasonable minimum of expenditure for education in every local school administrative unit. States would be defeating one of the purposes of Federal aid if they were to use the funds in such a manner as to fail to provide a reasonably adequate educational opportunity for all.
11. Some Federal agency must necessarily be assigned the responsibility for apportioning the funds and for determining whether the objective requirements prescribed by law are observed as a condition for State participation in the funds. This responsibility should properly be assigned to the Office of Education which is the officially designated Federal agency for education. The Office of Education has always sought as a matter of policy to secure the cooperation and voluntary agreement of the responsible State education officials with respect to matters of policy interpretation and procedure in all matters involving Federal-State educational relationships.